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## Ovarian Cancer

Most women, whether young or in their senior years, are more concerned about breast cancer than they are ovarian cancer. And, rightly so because still more women die from breast cancer than ovarian cancer each year. It is estimated that 820 breast cancer deaths and 360 ovarian cancer deaths will occur in 2008 in Indiana. However, mortality from ovarian cancer is less likely to occur if found at an early stage. Ninety percent of the women who receive early treatment can expect to live for more than 5 years after ovarian cancer is diagnosed. It is important for women to get informed about ovarian cancer, to know their risks, and to not ignore symptoms. I encourage every Hoosier to talk to their loved ones about ovarian cancer.

### *Get Informed*

Ovarian cancer can occur in all ages and races. Yearly pelvic exams are important, but women need to know that a Pap test is not effective in screening for ovarian cancer at an early stage. So, women should not rely on a negative Pap test to dismiss changes in body functions that could signal possible ovarian cancer. Women need to be encouraged to be persistent in seeking care for symptoms that occur nearly every day over a few weeks period of time.

### *Know Your Risks*

If a woman is over the age of 63, she should be more aware of bodily changes. If a woman has had breast cancer, her risk increases for ovarian cancer. However, if she has had children and if she breastfed her children, her risks are lowered. Risk is also lowered if women use birth control pills. There is some evidence of a link between the use of talc in the genital area and ovarian cancer. In addition, some studies have demonstrated that women maintaining a low-fat diet for four years also may lower her ovarian cancer risk, so mothers should be encouraged to breastfeed infants and all women should reduce high fat foods in their daily nutrition intake.

### *Don't Ignore Symptoms*

It is important for women to talk to their health care provider about any early warning signs of ovarian cancer. Women should be supported to report early symptoms, which many times are dismissed or ignored. Some of the typical early signs are: lingering abdominal swelling or bloating, pelvic pressure or abdominal pain, urgency or frequency in urination, and trouble eating or feeling full soon after starting a meal. Other symptoms which are less specific to ovarian cancer are tiredness, pain during sex, constipation, and back pain.

Additional information on ovarian cancer can be found at the American Cancer Society Web site at: [www.cancer.org/docroot/home/index.asp](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/home/index.asp). Also available is the National Consensus Statement (June 2007) issued by the American Cancer society, the Society of Gynecologic Oncologists, and the Gynecologic Cancer Foundation at: [www.cancer.org/docroot/NWS/content/NWS\\_1\\_1x\\_Ovarian\\_Cancer\\_Symptoms\\_The\\_Silence\\_Is\\_Broken.asp](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/NWS/content/NWS_1_1x_Ovarian_Cancer_Symptoms_The_Silence_Is_Broken.asp)